

Weather and School Updates **by Dr. Jeff Danielsen, Superintendent**

As we get to the time of year when the winter weather is approaching, I am writing this column to remind everyone of how late starts, early dismissals, and no school day decisions are made. It is important that you know, as parents, that your child's safety is my utmost concern. I also want you to know that if you don't agree with my decision, you can keep your child home or come and pick your child up from school early. The best decision possible is made with the weather information that we have – we view several television stations, drive the roads, as well as talk with the National Weather Service.

Late starts – Late starts are called for two reasons. The main reason is that we need more time to get the busses out on the country roads and we need the daylight for the roads in town and out of town to begin the plowing process. On a normal day, our bus drivers are ready to head out about 6:30-6:45 AM. When we have a 10:30 late start, that delays that time until 8:30 – 8:45 AM. The second reason is to “buy time”, to see if the weather is going to get better and improve to start at 10:30 AM. I know this sometimes causes concern because of day care situations for parents, but I do use the late start time to review the conditions and see if they are going to improve. If they are not improving, then a “no school” decision is made.

Early dismissals – Early dismissals in the winter are primarily called to get students home with inclement weather during daylight hours. We may use a 12:30, 1:30 or 2:30 early dismissal time.

No School – We call no school when either weather is too difficult to get children to school with our busses (typically in town roads are better), and/or the weather is predicted to become worse throughout the day. This decision begins about 4:30-5:00 AM with several of us driving the in town roads and country roads. It also includes talking with meteorologists in Aberdeen about their predictions for snowfall, winds, etc. We make the best decisions possible, and sometimes the predictions are not 100% accurate.

Regarding cold temperatures: We will not call school off for cold temperatures unless the air temperature gets to the 25 to 30 below mark. Our busses are well heated and will run fine unless it is in that range of air temperature (busses don't feel wind chill). We do keep our buildings open for students when it is cold. Students won't wait outside in the bus lines, playground, etc. on those days. Unfortunately, the television media sometimes plays into the hype of calling off school around the state. You can be assured that we will not bring students to school if we believe they are in danger. If they have to walk to school on those cold days, I would ask that you find neighbors and friends and ask if they can help give your child a ride (please plan ahead). If you believe it is too cold, you can keep your child home. Northeastern SD is one of the coldest parts of the state during the winter and if we called off for the two-three weeks of cold weather we wouldn't be in session any of those days – that is why we use the 25-30 air temperature mark decision. Remember to help your child(ren) dress appropriately for cold weather – hats, boots, mittens, coats.

I hope this article helps you to understand that thought process that goes into late starts, early dismissals, no school calls, and cold weather. As your Superintendent, I take your child's safety very seriously. We do our best, barring problems with technology, to get information to all television stations, our radio stations, our district website, and our phone calls to your home to get you the latest information. Please make sure that your phone number is updated at the principal's office so that the call reaches you. Thank you.